



FIJI TRADES UNION CONGRESS

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FTUC MEDIA RELEASE NO: 18-05/12 APPOINTMENT OF NEW LABOUR MINISTER

The FTUC notes the statement issued by the Regime on the appointment of a new Minister for Labour as a "*reflection of commitment to labour.*" This claim appears to be hollow in wake of the recent Essential National Industries (ENI) Decree, the Public Order (Amendments) Decree (POAD) and the State Proceedings (Amendment) Decree. All these draconian decrees continue to undermine workers fundamental rights to Collective Bargaining, Freedom of Association, Freedom of Speech, protest or demonstration, right to seek redress grievances and disputes through the dispute settling machinery provided under the ERP.

The ENI further denies other fundamental rights to workers, such as maternity protection, sexual harassment protection and other benefits. The POAD restricts workers' right to meet freely and discuss issues of concern and interest to them. This decree places unreasonable restrictions on workers and the public at large that would not stand up for scrutiny in a normal Democracy or against UN Human Rights Declaration.

The Ministry of Labour has become dormant and ineffective. It has demonstrated no capacity to deal with workers issues, or Industrial relations or even enforce existing laws. It has curtailed the functions of the Wages Councils, the Employment Relations Advisory Board (ERAB) and the OHS Board. One of the more important roles of the Ministry is to promote good Industrial Relations practices which it has miserably failed to do. Reports of disputes can take as long as 6 months for the Ministry to respond to when

the law clearly states that it has to act within 30 days. The Permanent Secretary is never available for consultations with the stakeholders. The new Minister has a real task on hand and he must be prepared to abandon his old baggage and assume pro-active and impartial role. He inherits a Ministry that has almost become non functional.

The FTUC reiterates that sound industrial relations practices create a better business environment and instills confidence in investors quite apart from ensuring fair and decent working conditions. Fiji is a member of the ILO and the UN. It, therefore, has obligation to respect and ensure compliance with the UN Declaration on Human Rights and the ILO Core Conventions. The Ministry of Labour has the task of ensuring compliance by all stakeholders, including the Employers and the largest employer, the State itself. The FTUC looks forward to seeing some immediate improvements in this area and only after that, may one be able to comment whether the authorities “*have some real and genuine commitment to labour issues and rights*”, otherwise it is another window dressing.

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